



THE ORIGIN OF THE KAFIR OF THE HINDU KUSH.

By Colonel T. H. HOLDICH, R.E., C.B., C.I.E.

SPECULATIONS as to the origin of the Kafir have been free and frequent of late years. It has long been known that the Kafirs themselves claim a Greek origin, or at least that some, amongst the many tribes represented by the name of Kafir, claim this distinction. The most natural as well as the most recent hypothesis is, that they are the modern representatives of a very mixed race, chiefly of Tajak origin, who once occupied the lowlands of Badukshan, and that they have gradually been driven into the almost impenetrable fastnesses of the lofty mountains which they now occupy by successive generations of land-grabbers, who at present hedge them in under the names of Safi, Nimcha, Dehgan, etc. These people may have originally been Kafirs themselves, although, through contact with the outer world, they have lost the prominent physical attributes of the Kafir; but they now range themselves amongst the most fanatical of Mahomedan sects, and between them and the Kafirs of those hidden valleys which lie south of the Hindu Kush watershed, between the Panjshir and the Kunar rivers, there is nothing short of eternal blood-feud. Quite lately the Afghan has appeared on the Kafir borderland, and the process of proselytizing at the point of the bayonet has been commenced, which can but end in the extinction of the infidel forms of faith. There are villages to be seen in the Kunar basin where yet you may find the quaint dead-boxes of the Kafir—the wooden receptacles into which their dead are laid without the form of burial—side by side with the Mahomedan grave, with its neat and orderly mound of earth decorated with stones, and with a wooden effigy at head and foot. The religious observances of the Kafir are so mixed, and show such an impartial leaning to Zoroastrianism, Brahmanism, and pure heathen superstition, that it might appear that they are either the possessors of an original form of religion, from which has been evolved the first principles of other modern forms, or that their own form is but an imperfect adaptation of Gabr and Brahmanic beliefs to an ancient mythology.

Apparently they have no written language the characters of which might give us a clue to their origin, and not much is to be gained from the study of a language colloquially whose dialects vary so much between tribe and tribe, that tribal inter-communication is frequently impossible. It must be remembered, however, that Kafiristan is but very partially explored. Only the fringe of the country has been visited as yet, and we cannot presume to say what may be found in the interior. The people whom we know best are Kamdesh Kafirs from the lower Bashgol valley. The Bashgol is a large affluent of the Kunar river, joining it from the north-west some 40 miles below Chitral; the Bashgol valley in its upper reaches being separated from Chitral by the barrier of the

Hasund range, which reaches an altitude of 15,000 to 16,000 feet above sea-level opposite Chitral.

In the case of the Kamdesh Kafir, at least, the tradition of Greek or Pelægic origin seems likely to be verified in a very remarkable way. Scientific inquiry has been converging on him from several directions, and it seems possible that the ethnographical riddle connected with his existence will be solved ere long. In appearance he is of a distinct Aryan type, with low forehead and prominent aquiline features entirely free from Tartar or Mongolian traits; his eyes, though generally dark, are frequently of a light grey colour; his complexion is fair enough to pass for southern European; his figure is always slight, but indicating marvellous activity and strength; and the modelling of his limbs would furnish study for a sculptor. In rapidity of movement over a hill country he stands unrivalled even amongst Himalayan people. His manners, customs, and dress have all been recently well described by Dr. (now Sir George) Robertson, whose adventurous spirit led him to spend some months amongst the Kafirs of lower Bashgol.

At the present moment Kafiristan extends no further eastward than the valley of the Kunar river, but there appears to have been a time in remote history when the Kafirs occupied the fertile valleys of Bajour, Swát, and Dir—valleys which for subsequent centuries formed part of a great Buddhist kingdom prior to the advent of the Yusafzais upon the scene. Readers of Arrian's history of the invasion of India by Alexander will remember that much of the interest of that graphic narrative centres itself on this border of India. Though comparatively unknown and even unexplored in these days, it must be remembered that to ancient classical writers this was perhaps the best known of all the out-lying districts of India. The recognized road to India from Central Asia was that which passed through the plains of Kabul, by the valley of the Kabul river into Laghmán, or Lamghán, and thence by the open Dasht-i-Gumbaz into the lower Kunar. From the Kunar valley this road, even to the time of Baber's invasion of India (early in the sixteenth century), crossed the comparatively low intervening range into Bajor; thence to the valleys of the Panjkora and Swat, and out into India by the same passes with which we have now (after nearly four hundred years) found it convenient to enter the same districts. As it was the first great avenue of approach to India, so its geography became more especially familiar by repute, and there is, consequently, more accurate geographical reference to the valleys of the Kophenes and the Khoaspes (i.e. the Kabul and the Kunar) in classical authors than to any other part of the hydrography of India.

On the right bank of the Panjkora river (the ancient Ghoura), nearly opposite to its junction with the river of Swat (Snastos), is a very conspicuous mountain whose three-headed outline can be distinctly seen from the Peshawar cantonment, known as the Koh-i-Mor, or

mountain of Mor. On the southern slopes of this mountain, near the foot of it, is a large scattered village called Nuzar, or Nusar. The sides of the mountain spurs are clothed with the same forest and jungle that is common to the mountains of Kafiristan, and to the hills intervening between Kafiristan and the Koh-i-Mor. Amidst this jungle is to be found the wild vine and ivy.

Now let us turn to Arrian's history. After fierce fighting in the Kunar valley with a people who "far excelled all other Indians in military exploits," Alexander passed through the territories of the Guræi, and crossed the river of that name (now called Panjkora) with great difficulty, "not only because of the depth and rapidity of the stream, but by reason of the vast number of round and slippery stones at the bottom," and led his army against the city of Massaga, the capital of the Assakeni. This city was in the upper Swat valley, and it made a brilliant but unavailing defence. Then followed the march to Embolina, on the Indus (now known as Umb), and the episode of Aornos, one of the most stirring tales in history. After the reduction of that natural fortress (now identified beyond dispute with Mahaban), we are told that, "descending from the rock, he marched into the territories of the Assakeni" *again*, "for he had heard that the brother of Assacenus . . . had fled into the mountains there, and when he arrived at the city of Dyrta (Dir), found both that and all the country round entirely destitute of inhabitants." Thus it is clear that he retraced his steps for many marches towards the Kunar valley, hunting the brother of Assacenus. Apparently he never caught him, that chieftain having probably betaken himself to the Chitrali hills, where the roads, as we know, are bad, and where there is not much room for fighting. Alexander then turned "towards the Indus," and "entered that part of the country which lies between the two rivers, Kophenes (Kabul) and Indus, where Nysa is said to be situate." "The city," says Arrian, "was built by Dionysos, or Bacchus, when he conquered the Indians; but who this Bacchus was, or at what time or from whence he conquered the Indians, is hard to determine. Whether he was that Theban who from Thebes, or he who from Tmolus, a mountain of Lydia, undertook that famous expedition into India, . . . is very uncertain." However, as soon as Alexander arrived there, a deputation of Nysæans, headed by one Akulphist, waited on him, and after recovering from the terror that his extraordinary appearance inspired, they presented a petition. "The Nysæans entreat thee, O king, for the reverence thou bearest to Dionysos their god, to leave their city untouched, . . . for Bacchus . . . built this city for an habitation for such of his soldiers as age or accidents had rendered unfit for military service, . . . He called this city Nysa (Νῦσον) after the name of his nurse; . . . the mountain also, which is so near us, he would have denominated Meros (or the thigh), alluding to his birth from that of

Jupiter; . . . and as an undoubted token that this place was founded by Bacchus, the ivy, which is to be found nowhere else throughout all India, flourishes in our territories."

Why, in the face of such a plain description of the city of Nysa, so great an authority as M. de St. Martin should identify it with Nisata, which is in the open plain near the juncture of the Kabul and Swat rivers, I cannot say. There is no mountain near Nisata, and no ivy nearer than that grown in some of the pretty gardens at Peshawar. Alexander, for reasons of his own (and Arrian seldom fails to supply him with real mean ones), was pleased with the deputation, and granted the petition, and ordered that a hundred of the chief citizens should accompany him. It was then that Akulphis showed much native shrewdness in suggesting that, if he had the good of the city at heart, he should take two hundred of the worst citizens instead of one hundred of the best—a suggestion that appealed at once to the sympathies of an administrator like Alexander, and the demand was withdrawn. Alexander is then said to have visited the mountain and sacrificed to Bacchus, his Macedonian troops meanwhile making garlands of ivy, "wherewith they crowned their heads, singing, and calling loudly upon the god, not only by the name of Dionysos, but by all his other names." A truly Bacchic orgie seems to have followed; and all this undoubtedly took place at the foot of the Koh-i-Mor, which is within sight of Peshawar, and hard by where our troops have fought their way to Chitral.

But who were the Nysæans, and what became of them? M. de St. Martin says that the name Nysa is clearly of Persian or Median origin; and we find in the 'Indika' of Arrian some further description of the Nysæans. "The Assakenoi" (who inhabited the upper Swat valley east of Nysa), says Arrian, "are not men of great stature like the Indians, . . . not so brave, nor yet so swarthy as most Indians. They were in old times subject to the Assyrians; then, after a period of Median rule, submitted to the Persians. . . . The Nysaioi, however, *are not an Indian race*, but descendants of those who came to India with Dionysos," etc. He adds that the mountain "on the lower slopes of which Nysa is built" is designated Meros, and he clearly distinguishes between Nysaioi and Assakenoi.

Ptolemy barely mentions Nysa, but we learn a good deal about the supposed origin of the Nysæans from fragments of the 'Indika' of Megasthenes, which have been collected by Dr. Schwanbeck, and translated by McCrindle. We learn that Dionysos was a most beneficent conqueror. He taught the Indians how to make wine and to cultivate their fields; he introduced the first "sanatarium" by retreating to Meros in the hot weather, where "the army, recruited by the cool breezes and the waters which flowed fresh from the fountains, recovered from sickness. . . . Having achieved altogether many great and noble works, he was regarded as a deity, and obtained immortal honors," etc.

Again we read, in a fragment quoted by Strabo, that the reason of calling the mountain above Nysa by the name of Meron was that "ivy grows there, and also the vine, although its fruit does not come to perfection, as the clusters, on account of the heaviness of the rains, fall off the trees before ripening. They" (the Greeks) "further call the Oxydrakai descendants of Dionysos, because the vine grew in their country, and their processions were conducted with great pomp, and their kings, on going forth to war, and on other occasions, marched in Bacchic fashion with drums beating," etc.

Again, we find, in a fragment quoted by Polyænus, that Dionysos, "in his expedition against the Indians, in order that the cities might receive him willingly, disguised the arms with which he had equipped his troops, and made them wear soft raiment and fawn-skins. The spears were wrapped round with ivy, and the thyrsus had a sharp point. He gave the signal for battle by cymbals and drums instead of the trumpet; and, by regaling the enemy with wine, diverted their thoughts from war to dancing. These and all other Bacchic orgies were employed in the system of warfare by which he subjugated the Indians and the rest of Asia."

All these lively legends point to a very early subjugation of India by a Western race (who may have been of Greek origin) before the invasions of Assyrian, Mede, or Persian. It could not well have been later than the sixth century B.C., and might have been earlier by many centuries. The Nysseans, whose city Alexander spared, were the descendants of those conquerors, who, coming from the West, were probably deterred by the heat of the plains of India from carrying their conquests south of the Punjab. They settled on the cool and well-watered slopes of those mountains which crown the uplands of Swat and Bajaur, where they cultivated the vine for generations, and after the course of centuries, through which they preserved the tradition of their Western origin, they welcomed the Macedonian conqueror as a man of their own faith and nation. It seems possible that they may have extended their habitat as far eastward as the upper Swat valley and the mountain region of the Indus, and at one time may have occupied the site of the ancient capital of the Assakenoi, Massaga, which there is reason to suppose stood in about the position now occupied by the town of Manglaor; but they were clearly no longer there in the days of Alexander, and must be distinguished as a separate race altogether from the Assakenoi. As the centuries rolled on, this district of Swat, together with the valley of Dir, became a great head-quarters of Buddhism. It is from this part of the trans-frontier that some of the most remarkable of those sculptures have been taken which exhibit so strong a Greek and Roman influence in their design. They are the undoubted relics of stupas, dagobas, and monasteries belonging to a period of a Buddhist occupation of the country, which was established

after Alexander's time. Buddhism did not become a state religion till the reign of Asoka, grandson of that Sandrakottos (Chandragupta) to whom Megasthenes was sent as ambassador; and it is improbable that any of these buildings existed in the time of the Greek invasion, or we should certainly have heard of them.

But along with these Buddhist relics there have been lately unearthed certain strange inscriptions, which have been submitted by their discoverer, Major Deane, to a congress of orientalist, who can only pronounce them to be in an unknown tongue. They have been found in the Indus valley east of Swat, most of them being engraved on stone slabs, which have been built into towers, now in ruins. The towers are comparatively modern, but it by no means follows that these inscriptions are so. It is the common practice of Pathan builders to preserve any engraved or sculptured relic that they may find, by utilizing them as ornamental features in their buildings. It has probably been a custom from time immemorial. Only lately I observed evidences of this propensity in the graveyard at Chagan Sarai, in the Kunar valley, where many elaborately carved Buddhist fragments were let into the sides of their roughly built "chabutras," or sepulchres, with the obvious purpose of gaining effect thereby. No one would say where those Buddhist fragments came from. The Kunar valley appears at first sight to be absolutely free from Buddhist remains, although it would naturally be selected as a most likely field for research. These undeciphered inscriptions may possibly be found to be vastly more ancient than the towers they adorned. It is, at any rate, a notable fact about them that some of them "recall a Greek alphabet of archaic type." So great an authority as M. Senart inclines to the opinion that their authors must be referred to the Skythian or Mongolian invaders of India; but he refers at the same time to a sculptured and inscribed monument in the Louvre, of unknown origin, the characters on which resemble those of the new script. "The subject of this sculpture seems to be a Bacchic procession." What if it really is a Bacchic procession, and the characters thereon inscribed prove to be an archaic form of Greek—the forgotten forms of the Nysæan alphabet?

Whilst surveying lately in the Kunar valley along the Kafiristan borderland, I made the acquaintance of two Kafirs of Kamdesh, who stayed some little time in the Afghan camp, in which my own tent was pitched, and who were objects of much interest to the members of the boundary commission there assembled. They submitted gracefully enough to much cross-examination, and amongst other things they sang a war-hymn to their god Gish, and executed a religious dance. Gish is not supreme in their mythology, but he is the god who receives by far the greatest amount of attention, for the Kafir of the lower Bashgol is ever on the raid, always on the watch for the chance of a Mahomedan life. It is, indeed, curious that whilst tolerant enough to allow of the

existence of Mahomedan communities in their midst, they yet rank the life of a Mussulman as the one great object of attainment, so that a Kafir's social position is dependent on the activity he displays in searching out the common enemy, and his very right to sing hymns of adoration to his war-god is strictly limited by the number of lives he has taken. The hymn which these Kafirs recited, or sang, was translated word by word, with the aid of a Chitrali interpreter, by a Munshi, who has the reputation of being a most careful interpreter, and the following is almost a literal transcript, for which I am indebted to Dr. MacNab, of the Q.O. Corps of Guides :—

“O thou who from Gir-Nysa's (lofty heights) was born
 Who from its sevenfold portals didst emerge,
 On Katan Chirak thou hast set thine eyes,
 Towards (the depths of) Sum Bughul dost go,
 In Sum Baral assembled you have been.
 Sanji from the heights you see; Sanji you consult?
 The council sits. O mad one, whither goest thou?
 Say, Sanji, why dost thou go forth?”

The words within brackets are introduced, otherwise the translation is literal. Gir-Nysa means the mountain of Nysa, Gir being a common prefix denoting a peak or hill. Katan Chirak is explained to be an ancient town in the Minjan valley of Badakshan, now in ruins, but it was the first large place that the Kafirs captured, and is apparently held to be symbolical of victory. This reference connects the Kamdesh Kafirs with Badakshan, and shows these people to have been more widespread than they are at present. Sum Bughal is a deep ravine leading down to the plain of Sum Baral, where armies are assembled for war. Sanji appears to be the oracle consulted before war is undertaken. The chief interest of this verse (for I believe it is only one verse of many, but it was all that our friends were entitled to repeat) is the obvious reference in the first line to the mountain of Bacchus, the Meros from which he was born, on the slopes of which stood the ancient Nysa. It is, indeed, a Bacchic hymn (slightly incoherent, perhaps, as is natural), and only wants the accessories of vine-leaves and ivy to make it entirely classical.

The vines and ivy are not far distant. In making a slow progress through one of the deep “darras,” or ravines, of the western Kunar basin, leading to the snow-bound ridges that overlook Bashgol, I was astonished at the free growth of the wild vine, and the thick masses of ivy which here and there clung to the buttresses of the rugged mountain spurs as ivy clings to less solid ruins in England. The Kafirs have long been celebrated for their wine-making. Early in the nineteenth century, when the adventurer Baber, on his way to found the most magnificent dynasty that India has ever seen at Delhi, first captured the ancient city of Bajor, and then moved on to the valley of Jandoul, now made historic by another adventurer, Umra Khan, he was perpetually indulging in drinking-parties, and he used to ride in from Jandoul

to Bajaor to join his cronies in a real good Bacchic orgie more frequently than was good for him. He has a good deal to say about the Kafir wine in that inimitable diary of his, and his appreciation of it was not great. It was, however, much better than nothing, and he drank a good deal of it. Through the kindness of the Sipah Salar, the Amir's commander-in-chief, I have had the opportunity of tasting the best brand of this classical liquor, and I agree with Baber—it is not of a high class. It reminded me of badly corked Chablis, which it much resembled in appearance.

Time may perhaps have further and more perfect information to lay before us about these strange people, the Kafirs. At present I cannot but believe them to be the modern representatives of that very ancient Western race, the Nysæans—so ancient that the historians of Alexander refer to their origin as mythical.

I feel that I must acknowledge my obligations to Mr. McCrindle, from whose excellent translations I have quoted freely, and whose classical research has pointed the way to some most interesting fields of inquiry in remote parts of India. His books possess the invaluable attribute of portability.



LAKE LOUISE, IN THE CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

By WALTER D. WILCOX.

WHILE making a hasty overland journey by the Canadian Pacific Railway during the summer of 1891, my attention was called to the remarkable beauty and grandeur of the Canadian Rockies. Again in July, 1893, in company with a college friend, I spent several weeks at Banff and Lake Louise, the latter a beautiful sheet of water surrounded by the grandest mountains along the line of the Canadian Pacific, and now annually visited by possibly one hundred tourists. Remaining two weeks at Lake Louise, we had time to attempt the ascent of the two highest mountains in the vicinity, but failed in each instance, being stopped by a vertical rock wall of great height on one mountain, and on the other by the dangerous condition of the snow, where we narrowly escaped an avalanche. We were not properly equipped for accomplishing much in a region unexplored and unmapped, where we were necessarily our own guides, and where, by reason of the heavy forests in the valleys, it is very difficult to carry a tent or provisions to any great distance from head-quarters.

The failure of this season inspired me with a desire to organize, if possible, a party for the summer of 1894, which should be equipped to thoroughly explore and survey the region in the vicinity of Lake Louise, to ascend several of the highest peaks, and to make photographs of every interesting feature. It is not necessary to dwell on the difficulties attending the organization of a party of men to travel several thousand miles to a region about which they knew nothing save what they could